

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF RESTORING FUNDING IN THE STATE BUDGET

Department of Pediatrics

FOR HELP ME GROW**March 3, 2015**Paul H. Dworkin, MD
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Senator Bye, Representative Walker, and Members of the Appropriations Committee:

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My name is Joanna Bogin and I am the Director of the Help Me Grow National Center Office based at the Connecticut Children's Medical Center. In this testimony, I urge your support of restoring state budget funding for Help Me Grow (HMG) and its central portal of entry, Child Development Infoline (CDI).

Supported in every biennial budget since 2002, HMG/CDI are critical components of our evolving system in support of the healthy development of Connecticut's children. HMG promotes the early identification of children at risk for development delays and behavioral problems and the connection of these vulnerable children to community-based programs and services that promote school readiness. I anticipate that you will hear supportive testimony on the value that HMG brings to Connecticut's young children. Childcare and education leaders will speak to the efficacy of HMG/CDI in linking vulnerable children and their families to community-based programs and services. Community-based organizations will share the value of HMG activities, such as networking breakfasts, to encourage synergy and collaboration among programs and address gaps in services. Families will describe the critical importance of facilitated access to community-based programs and services. Researchers will share the evidence that HMG strengthens family resiliency and protective factors that promote children's healthy development, as well as contributes to cost savings by "demedicalizing" developmental and behavioral concerns better served by community programs.

I will, therefore, use my limited and precious time to emphasize the extent to which eliminating funding for HMG/CDI will have adverse consequences for the children of Connecticut and across the nation. As a consequence of the blending of administrative and financial resources already committed to early childhood efforts across agencies, the funding required to ensure that HMG/CDI continues to serve as the Office of Early Childhood's central access point to services for young children is modest. Connecticut's

practice of blending funding from Part C of IDEA (i.e., Birth to Three), Part B of IDEA (i.e., Preschool Special Education), and the Title V Maternal and Child Health Services Block Grant (i.e., Children and Youth with Special Health Care Needs) to support CDI as their shared, central portal of entry achieves cost efficiencies that minimize the additional expense of HMG/CDI (i.e., less than \$400,000 per year). HMG provides the infrastructure to ensure access and linkage to community-based programs that address developmental and behavioral concerns for children not eligible for our excellent Part C and Part B programs. In Connecticut, HMG is the “glue” that underlies our early childhood system building. Our federal Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems grant, as well as the critical resources so important to the success of our recently funded, competitive home visiting (MIECHV) grant, derives from the HMG system.

Through its support of HMG/CDI, Connecticut is widely regarded as a leader in early childhood system building and promoting children’s healthy development. As a result of the success of Connecticut’s HMG, Connecticut Children’s Medical Center has received major, competitive grant funding from such prestigious sources as The Commonwealth Fund and the WK Kellogg Foundation to establish the Help Me Grow National Center (HMG NC) and provide technical assistance to other states seeking to replicate HMG. At present, 24 states are affiliates of the HMG NC and actively replicating this Connecticut-initiated innovation. Indeed, the impact of our efforts to system build in support of children’s healthy development is reverberating across all regions of the nation. Not only do other states follow our lead, but federal agencies encourage states to build HMG/CDI to ensure success in their grant-supported, early childhood system building efforts. Perhaps most encouraging is the observation that state funding for HMG is non-partisan, including states with Democratic governors and legislatures (e.g., Minnesota), as well as others under Republican control (e.g., Florida).

The support of our Executive and Legislative Branches over the past 13 years has emboldened us to encourage HMG leaders in other states to seek similar support to sustain their efforts. In fact, our First Lady, Cathy Malloy, enthusiastically endorsed HMG as keynote speaker for 2 HMG National Forums held in Hartford in 2011 and 2012. Her support inspired us to secure endorsements from Utah First Lady Jeanette Herbert and Delaware former Lieutenant Governor and current Attorney General Matt Denn. To date, states have primarily relied upon federal grants to build their HMG systems. While such support is critical in early phases of building HMG systems, we encourage states to follow Connecticut’s lead in ensuring budgetary support for sustaining HMG.

Though extraordinarily modest in cost, the impact of Help Me Grow and Child Development Infoline on the children and families of Connecticut is profound. Failure to restore funding will undermine our efforts to fulfill our State’s commitments to our youngest citizens and continue to lead the way for other states committed to young children’s healthy development and school readiness. The future well-being of our children requires your immediate and most urgent attention. Please support this precious resource and restore funding for HMG/CDI in the State budget.